

Response to HB 5606
Presented by:
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Representative Palmer and esteemed members of the Michigan House Education Committee, thank you for allowing me the time to speak with you today about HB 5606.

An editorial in the February 5, 2006 Detroit News criticizes the educational community claiming a "can't do spirit" among the leaders of school districts. I want you to know that in Macomb County, there is a spirit of rigor and high expectations for all high school students from Superintendents and Board of Education members. We have carefully reviewed and researched the discussions and proposals regarding High School Graduation Requirements and Reform at the State Board level and HB 5606. Our combined reactions to these proposals are included in a well documented portfolio prepared by Dr. Gayle Green, Chief Academic Officer for the Macomb Intermediate School District. I would like to highlight two areas of concern documented in that portfolio.

CHOICE. I will use an example from Center Line Public Schools to help explain this dilemma that I believe students will be forced into without careful consideration of the mandated requirements currently proposed. We have just implemented this year an EMS (Emergency Medical System) program for students. This is a vocationally certified program that will allow students at the completion of the course to take a nationally certified test enabling them to enter the work force as Emergency Medical Technicians. We used the successful EMS program offered in the Romeo Community School District in Macomb County as a model for this class. Some students enrolled in this class include young people who want to be doctors, nurses, x-ray technicians and pursue other careers in the health services. This class must be scheduled for two periods in order for students to learn all of the technical material to be successful. Unfortunately, given either the proposal from the State Board or the requirements as outlined in HB 5606, students in Center Line may not be able to continue to find the time in their class schedule to take this class. Why? Given a typical 6 period schedule for High School students and taking HB 5606 as an example – 4 of the six periods/year must be scheduled to meet the state requirements. Additionally, each district would have local requirements added to the mandated requirements. Let's say that is 6 additional credits so now a student needs 22 credits to graduate. Then, even assuming the student passes every class there is only small increments of time available for students to explore options like EMS. Many of the vocational classes (including EMS) have multi-year options. Please be mindful of this impact on student choices. High School is the point in the academic career of most students where we want them to explore options so that they are better prepared to make career choices in their post-secondary academic years. On Monday evening, I met with a group of 8th grade parents who are preparing to send their children to Center Line High School. When I explained the possible change in the requirements, several questions were asked about whether their child would have the choice to try several different classes like EMS. I couldn't guarantee the flexibility of choice that we have been able to offer in the past. Those parents voiced disappointment and anger in a proposal that would limit choices for their children.

FUNDING. The costs associated with implementing HB 5606 will force every district in the state to re-examine every current successful program in order to meet the mandated requirements. While we are being told that we need to re-adjust our programs in order to fund this bill, I am here to tell you that equals either reducing or eliminating successful programs that service our K-12 students everyday. At the very least, additional dollars will be needed in the transition. Funding for additional textbooks, unemployment, facilities (labs) for science and intensive student support for those kids caught in the 'rigor gap.' These costs will require Center Line Public Schools to possibly eliminate opportunities like the EMS program I discussed earlier. Already, we have had to reduce our successful elementary Spanish program because of the current school funding crisis.

In summary, I am asking that you carefully consider the Macomb County proposal, look at the research and data provided, contact the educational professionals and make certain that all decisions made will ultimately benefit every student in this state.